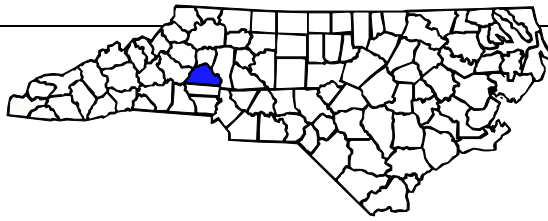


CATAWBA COUNTY PROFILE...



"Keeping the Spirit Alive Since 1842"

Located in a peaceful valley just east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Catawba County is a land of scenic beauty, diverse cultures, and thriving industry. Three beautiful lakes are located within its 405 square miles, and the Catawba River winds along its western, northern, and eastern border. The County is named for the river and the Catawba Indians who foraged in the valley and were friendly and helpful to the first settlers who arrived in 1747.

Catawba County was officially established on December 12, 1842, when Lincoln County was divided by an act of the North Carolina General Assembly. Citizens living in what is now Catawba County found it was too far to travel to Lincolnton, the Lincoln County seat, to conduct court business on a regular basis. Catawba County's seat was not selected until January 8, 1845. The North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation to the effect that "the present Town of Newton as selected and laid out shall be the site and location of the courthouse and jail of Catawba County." The final boundary line was moved to a point further north of Lincolnton than the line originally drawn, with the current boundary lying five and a half miles north of Lincolnton.

The County has eight cities and towns: Hickory, Newton, Conover, Maiden, Catawba, Claremont, Longview, and Brookford, and a total population of more than 146,000. The average temperature is 69 degrees Fahrenheit with an average high of 49 in January and 86 in June. On average, the County receives about fifty inches of rainfall and seven inches of snowfall per year. The average elevation in Catawba County is 1,165 feet.

Catawba County, the central county of North Carolina's fourth largest MSA, has successfully diversified and balanced its traditional manufacturing base of furniture, textile, and telecommunications. However, the layoffs in the last two years have been a challenge to traditional industries that have in the past benefited from Catawba County's economy being based on manufacturing. Comprehensive efforts are being directed at identifying and recruiting new sectors in manufacturing such as biomedical, pharmaceutical, technology and building products, and identifying and recruiting non-manufacturing sectors such as retirement and retail development. The once tight labor force has transitioned into a pool of skilled workers loyal to the area and its industries. Catawba County has been recognized as being one of the top ten areas in America to raise a family.

Catawba County has 40 public schools with nearly 24,000 students and is home to two colleges: Lenoir-Rhyne College, a 114 year old liberal arts institution and Catawba Valley Community College, a member of the North Carolina Community College system, which offers one and two year degree programs and a two year college transfer program as well as continuing education classes. The County is a major medical center, with two large hospitals, a substantial medical community, and many nursing home facilities.